

Artist Bio Workshop by [Ashley McKenzie-Barnes](#)

MAKING AN ARTIST BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

An artist biography can be viewed as the most relevant copy you will write about yourself.

Your biography will be used in media/press releases, catalogues, your website, social media channels, cover letter and portfolio. It's also essential for potential jobs, clients, interviews, galleries exhibitions and driving SEO (Search Engine Optimization).

When it comes to writing your own story, remember that every artist or creative professional has something to share or they wouldn't be creating. When you take time to credit even the most minute details or humblest beginnings, you can turn them into powerful and impressive stories.

For example—Keith Haring

That artist began using the city as his canvas, making chalk drawings in subway stations. His style became public ally acclaimed as it was seen anywhere from public murals to nightclubs. His success was based on his unique application and bold story and statements and eventually landed him into to galleries and respected museums around the world. He was also known for his activism in promoting AIDS awareness. Not a glamorous start but he turned his backstory and creative approach into a well-recognized visual language.



MAKING THE IDEAL BIOGRAPHY

There are a few basics to consider when starting your Artist biography

- (According to Artsy) audience engagement researchers at museums have found that visitors lose interest in wall labels after 150 words
- Lead with your power statement. Significant facts about your artistic practice versus opening with personal points
- Should be short, clear and to the point
- (According to Artsy) the ideal biography 120 words
- Though some sites or submissions require a 80-100 word bio, that is tightly summarized

The flow of the paragraphs that follow will organically come together when your story does. How we get to developing your story is what we will be discussing next. Through thoughtful questions and self-exploration we should discover the process of writing an Artist biography.

You'll find that you will start to hear these questions throughout your career a lot. They will become the standard research on what it "is" to be an artist. *Very cliché.*

However, understand that you need to know these answers for a reason. They help identify who you are as a person and in your artistic practice. The sooner you can answer these questions for yourself – the more prepared you are to present your work.

HIGHLIGHT YOUR BACKGROUND

Learning to highlight the small details is important

Many people don't believe they actually have a specific calling or passion. For this reason, you need to narrate your story around what you DO know about yourself.

Start by answering the questions on the sheet in front of you (2 mins). When you're an emerging artist, having a starting point can be useful. Later on in your career you may find this information relevant no longer relevant.

1. When did you discover that you were an artist?
2. Or when did you decide you wanted to pursue your art?

Also, recognizing what you care about, and take interest in, can point you in the direction of why you create. This is important because it strategically allows your art, your lifestyle and your passions to connect your personality to your artistic expression.

Few more questions.

3. What are your top 2 interests/passions? (2 mins)

For example:

- Social and political issues/race
- Gender identity
- Music/Pop culture
- Food/culinary
- Romance/relationships
- Education
- Environmentalism
- Animals/nature
- Traveling
- Religion or spirituality
- Personal growth and self-care

Once you're done listing them, write down if there's any correlation with your interests and your artistic practice.

If yes, write down the correlation (1 min).

If no, explain – what fuels your art/creative (1 min).

Be careful to not mention things that are hobbies with no correlation to your practice, or you will present your art as something that's just a hobby.

4. What are the EXPERIENCES that have influenced what you create? (2 mins)

For example:

- A break-up
- A mentor
- Isolation
- Where you grew-up
- Health/mental health
- Inspiration from others
- Appreciation of a specific art form
- Schooling
- Identifying a gap in the industry
- Community involvement and belonging
- Missed opportunity
- Creating a new opportunity
- Failure at something else
- Surprisingly successful attempt at something new

If you're still stuck on starting a process of your own, take a few minutes to listen to another perspective on **how to narrate your life story** here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Brpk26Oq4aE&feature=emb_logo

5. List your relevant experience (5 mins). Your bio should also emphasize professional credentials. Remember to choose your most significant achievements to date.

For example:

- Juried exhibitions
- Accolades/awards
- Competitions
- Press/media coverage
- Professional or volunteer work experience that relates to your artistic practice
- Notable clients/commissions
- Notable collaborations
- Scholarships and educational background that relates to your artistic practice
- Residencies

- Successful grants received
- Community engagement that relates to your artistic practice

STRUCTURE AND QUALITY OF WRITING

Once you have compiled the above info, it is important to piece it together and edit for style.

In addition to following general rules of grammar, be particularly sensitive to the flow of your document; there is a lot of information packed into each sentence. The following exercises will help to edit for style:

- Write in the third person. Using your last name, and pronouns like he, she or they. This provides flexibility and objectivity
- Piece your sentences together. Ensure that transitions are logical and smooth
- Avoid having your bio read like a formula. Merge sentences, edit out unnecessary words/content, and add a few colourful descriptive words as needed
- Read your biography out loud. Listen to how it sounds and edit those sections that seem clumsy or “feel” incomplete

SAMPLE OF A SIMPLE ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Hannele Lahti

| www.hannelelahti.com

Artist Biography

Hannele Lahti is a nationally-recognized documentary and fine art photographer based in the Washington, D.C. area. Creating images of the natural world, her work allows her to constantly explore new places and image-making techniques, inviting the viewer to see nature in diverse ways. Her stock photographs and video footage are represented by National Geographic Creative.

Lahti actively participates in the District’s photographic community. She is a member of Women Photojournalists of Washington, served as Co-President of the D.C. Chapter of the American Society of Media Photographers, and sat on the board of FotoDC. She earned her BFA in Photographic Illustration from the Rochester Institute of Technology.

sample from: taliarwanda.wordpress.com

LAST, HAVE YOUR BIOGRAPHY PROOF-READ

Being an artist doesn’t mean you’re also a creative writer or copy-writer.

Always try to have a industry professional or editor read over your bio.

6. At-home draft (30-45 mins):

Share your statements with a partner, friend or family member at home. Have them carefully read-over your statements and edit for grammar and style. Have them ask questions where statements are unclear. Edit based on your their feedback and finalize your biography statement.

ART CATEGORIES/LEVELS

by bmoreart.com

The Emerging Artist:

An emerging artist is someone who's in the early stage of their career, someone who's caught the eye of an art critic and/or gallery, but hasn't yet established a solid reputation as an artist amongst art critics, art buyers, and art galleries. An artist who has specialized training in his or her field (not necessarily gained in an academic institution), who is at the beginning of his or her career, and who has created a modest independent body of work.

The term emerging artist is often used for young and recently graduated from art college, but can also apply to someone who's made a career change or recently decided to prioritize their art above everything else. You could say it's a label art galleries use because it sounds better than "new artist" or "unknown artist."

The Mid-Career Artist:

The mid-career artist has created an independent body of work over a number of years and who has received regional or national recognition through publication or public presentation of his or her work. A mid-career Artist has had a significant number of solo exhibitions at significant galleries and museums, located nationally or internationally, rather than locally.

This category says nothing about age of the artist or even a specific number of years in their careers. To be considered a mid-career artist, you must have received regional or national recognition through "Publication" or "Public Presentation" of your work. What does this mean? The publication part means that you have had significant publications about you and your work, most likely through a major museum or publishing house. Public presentation also indicates museum exhibitions, rather than just commercial galleries. mid-career Artists have established a national or international following and exhibit in many different states and countries, rather than in a local or regional area.

The Established Artist:

The established artist is at a mature stage in his or her career and who has created an extensive body of independent work. An established artist has reached an advanced level of achievement by sustaining a nationally or internationally recognized contribution to the discipline.

This type of artist is considered a 'blue chip' artist in the market. Their work's value has been decided through consistent years of sales, and confirmed at auction. However, many artists and artist's dealers don't want to risk an auction sale at Christie's or Sotheby's because there is a chance the work could decline in value. Rather than putting it up for auction, many artist's dealers will buy back the work, keeping the value consistent. Many artists remain in the "Mid-Career" category until after their deaths for this reason.